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1918

APOLOGIA

OF

# HOLMES AMMIDOWN.

BY

Yours Sincerely

St. Augustine, Fla. Feb. 6th 1881.

ARTOTYPE, E. BIERSTADT, N Y

# MEMORIAL

OF

# HOLMES AMMIDOWN.

By CLARK JILLSON.

(Reprinted from the Proceedings of The Worcester Society of Antiquity for 1883.)

WORCESTER:
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# HON. HOLMES AMMIDOWN.

Worcester County is noted for having been the birth-place of many illustrious men, whose lives have adorned society and elevated the professions, many of whom have occupied the front rank among those exhibiting remarkable activity in fostering and defending the rapid development of our American institutions. The early settlers were fitted, and seemingly selected, by natural causes, for the various places they occupied with such rare fidelity, and their near descendants partook largely of many qualities common to the original stock.

Holmes Ammidown was a faithful representative of early New England life and manners. He was a lineal descendant of Roger Aimédoune, a Huguenot refugee, who became one of the early settlers of Boston, the name of one of his children being of the first recorded among the births in that town. Roger embraced a liberal faith for the time, and became a tenacious admirer of Roger Williams and William Blackstone. He finally settled in the southern part of Massachusetts, near Rhode Island, where his descendants continued to dwell for more than two centuries, making for themselves and their race an honorable reputation, always exhibiting great strength of character, stability of purpose, and, without effort or admonition, maintaining the strictest integrity.

Caleb Ammidown, the grandfather of Holmes, was a member of the Legislature for many years, and a firm supporter of the state authorities during the perilous time of the rebellion in 1788.

Luther Ammidown, the father of Holmes, was a man of varied information, possessing a full knowledge of the political condition of his own state, and a general knowledge of the primary elements of civil government, as understood under the American system. He was constantly appealed to as counsellor by his fellow townsmen, and was always found to be a liberal promotor of advanced public sentiment.

Holmes Ammidown, the subject of this sketch, was born in what is now Southbridge, Mass., June 12, 1801.*

Previous to the age of twenty-one, most of his time was spent at his father's home, where he grew up under the inflexible discipline of an early New England farmer whose range of thought, as communicated to his children, compassed but little outside of his own neighborhood, and whose highest aim in life, was to become familiar with the raising of farm produce in primitive and puritanic style. The man was content, but the boy was inspired with a spirit of progress, and the farm became too small a field for him. His schooling was meagre, but his power to grasp what others failed to comprehend, rendered him capable of becoming a teacher in the district school during a portion of his minority.

At the age of twenty-one, he entered into partnership with an older brother in keeping a country store, in his native town. At the age of twenty-five, he married the daughter of Daniel Hodges, Esq., of Warren, Mass., who survives him, after nearly sixty years of married life. While Mr. Ammidown was in business in Southbridge, before he was thirty years of age, his public interest in the affairs of the town became manifest in various ways, and the inhabitants of Southbridge are to-day reaping the benefits as they accrue from the efforts of his early life. The few years he spent in his native town, were not lost to him, and the labors he performed, of a public character, will continue in grateful remembrance. He laid out four of the main roads into the town, organized the Southbridge Bank, built a hotel, and improved and beautified the town cemetery where his remains now repose.

In 1835, his health failed, and by advice of physicians, he sought a milder climate, removing to Charleston, S. C., where he remained in business about a year. In the spring of 1836, on his return to Massachusetts, he visited Washington, D. C., and there had the honor of being presented to President Jackson. There were but few railroads in the country at that time, and his journey was performed by stage, where he had an opportunity to meet many of the prominent men of that time. Being exceedingly

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*Southbridge was taken from Sturbridge, Charlton and Dudley, and incorporated a town in 1816.

social himself, he formed many new acquaintances during this journey, and his description of men and things as they then appeared to him, was at least delightful.

On his return to Southbridge, he received a cordial welcome, and his townsmen having implicit confidence in his integrity and ability elected him as their representative in the state Legislature. Before the session closed, he was admitted to partnership in a dry goods firm in Boston, then well established. His business affairs were closed in Charleston, and thereafter his time and energy were utilized in the interest and for the success of his chosen occupation, in which he continued for a quarter of a century. He may justly be termed one of the old-time merchants of Boston, and one of the most honorable of his profession. He never manifested a desire to become famous through any of the devious channels leading to public office, but he was constantly consulted, and his advice was highly prized by politicians as well as by business men. As a bank director, insurance director or railroad president, he exhibited the same energy and clear judgment which were so prominent in the successful management of his own business.

He was active in several religious associations, though never a professor himself, nor a believer in any special creed to the exclusion of others; but he was ever ready to contribute to the support of the Christian Church, and he thoroughly believed in the dissemination of Christian principles. He was generous to the poor, and many a sufferer might have bestowed his gratitude upon Holmes Ammidown without mistake, even though he was not informed who lifted his heart from sadness.

Mr. Ammidown early developed a taste for history and genealogy, and made a journey through the towns of Weymouth, Mendon, Rehoboth, and others, in 1844, to collect facts and records, and gather up traditions from the lips of venerable men and women, relating to his own ancestry, and the history of the localities where they had lived.

At the close of his business career, his sons having established themselves in business in New York city, he purchased a residence there in 1863, which remained his home till the close of his life.

Here he turned his attention more closely to historical research. In this new field he found himself better equipped than might have been supposed. He enjoyed an extensive business acquaintance and experience, and had already made for himself, an unsullied reputation by his own industry and enterprise, therefore he had every reason to believe that the same energy applied to his new calling would insure some measure of success. He made personal examination of public and private records, state and town archives, and various libraries for facts bearing upon the local history of Southbridge, and several other adjacent towns on both sides of the state line. He had the good fortune to discover many forgotten points in the early history of the southern part of Massachusetts, some of which were in relation to what was known as "Middlesex Gore" and the "Saltonstall Purchase." He spent fifteen years in this work, during which time he collected a large and valuable library of rare books and documents relating to the subject of his studies. In 1877, he published the result of his research in two octavo volumes, under the title of "Historical Collections."

The Manchester (N. H.) *Union* contains the following, in relation to this work:

"The string on which his pearls are strung is I imagine, the line of his genealogy. Oxford, the first town whose history was written, was peopled to a considerable extent by persecuted Huguenots. To make clear the character of these exiled Huguenots, he recites the history of the Reformation, compares the Protestants of France with those of England and gives the history of the Pilgrims and the Puritans. His research is thorough and exhaustive. The work is an encyclopedia of historical information. In writing the history of the seven towns, Oxford, Dudley, Webster, Sturbridge, Charlton, Southbridge and Woodstock, he digresses often to give collateral information. Biographies of leading men are inserted. I have nowhere found more pleasant and instructive books. They are suited to all ages and conditions of men."

I quote the following from a letter published March 30, 1883, only four days before his death:

"Mr. Ammidown is still engaged in literary pursuits. He is a genial, polished gentleman of the old school, wise enough to be a teacher of any 'new school.' Mr. Ammidown is a philanthropist. It may be said of him as of the Roman Centurion, 'He loveth our nation and hath built us a synagogue.' The existence of a public library, reading room and museum,

in his native town, attest his generosity. His name is also associated with many valuable improvements in St. Augustine. He is one of the chief supporters of the Presbyterian Church in that city. In fact, everybody knows and loves the retired merchant and scholar, Holmes Ammidown."

Although Mr. Ammidown's residence was in New York city, his winters, of late years, have been spent in St. Augustine, Florida, where he made a host of new friends. His desire to do good was ever present, and his philanthropy was not left in Massachusetts or New York. He aided with a liberal hand the formation of a public library and reading room in St. Augustine, and while a resident there, carefully studied the history of Florida and published a large map of St Augustine.

He planted a great variety of ornamental trees and shrubs to adorn the old plaza of the ancient city, and also suggested that a full supply of water for the city might be attained, after sinking artesian wells in the plaza and on his own premises. One of the last acts of his life was a successful effort to obtain from the general government, suitable grounds in the city for the depot of the new railroad from Jacksonville.

He visited Southbridge every summer, where he did much to enhance its material growth and prosperity. He built a large and costly brick block to accommodate the public library of the town and established a reading room and museum, all of which add largely to the educational facilities already so abundant in New England, thereby making his native town one of the pleasantest places in Worcester County for a country residence.

In personal appearance, Mr. Ammidown was of more than average height, rather slender, but well proportioned. His form was erect, his movements quick and energetic. his entire make-up the embodiment of self-control and stability of purpose. His keen eye perceived, his cultivated intellect fathomed, and his well balanced mind comprehended in a remarkable degree, the intricate methods of business, and the pleasures of social life as well.

His manner was such as to draw around him numerous admiring friends, and those who wanted to be enemies, were frequently captured by his disinterested appreciation of their own merits. One of his strong points was that of being possessed of an uncom-

mon memory. All that he had seen or read, seemed to remain in panoramic order before his mental vision. Persons who had devoted themselves to special subjects, were surprised to find his knowledge of their own business more acute and comprehensive than their own. His contributions to the public press were numerous, wherein he expressed his own thoughts and feelings in his own way. Only five days before his death, the *Times-Union*, of Jacksonville, published an article of his, just written, on the tariff question, wherein he displayed the clearness and vigor of early manhood. This was his last work.

He died on the third day of April, 1883, in St. Augustine, Florida, at the age of eighty-two, and his remains now repose in his family tomb at Southbridge.

Taking a retrospective view of the life of Mr. Ammidown, embracing his business career, his literary tastes and acquirements, his efforts in behalf of his fellow-men and for the advancement of all that is deemed worthy of public approval, his integrity, his winning manners, his positive and well defined opinions, and the frankness with which he maintained them, we cannot fail to recognize the fact, that the world is better for his having lived in it, and that coming generations may profit by an appeal to the record he has so honorably made.

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